

## Picture This—a review of Steve Celestini's solo debut album

By Biff Jennings

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Steve Celestini might never be a big star in the modern music world, for a couple of reasons - the same reasons that you should be listening to him. You can't market somebody who can't be pigeonholed. Call him a power crooner. Or a balladeer, or white soul, or an Okie with elocution. That's a good start. And you can understand him. In a time full of autotune R&B, fake twangs and mumbling through your grill, Steve's vocals serve the words.. Clean, smooth, inflected only with emotion. The right words don't need to hide.

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Here are my picks and why I keep playing them.

"Picture this" is an excellent opener, a tune about how we (he) found a partner that is better than he deserved, hitched his wagon to that star, and is grateful for it. On "Lonesome Troubadour" Steve manages to move easily and timelessly from "davenport" to "hipsters" in graceful succession. Wistful in tone, the lyric line and arrangement are perfect background for his velvet glove vocals. I figure he just might have been that "Lonesome Troubadour" once upon a time. Turning to a lost love theme, "Won't let you forget me" is an over the shoulder look back scattered throughout with flowing unforced allusions like "fog banks lift, shed a little light" that would be tough for anybody but a writer to carry with such ease. When you get to "My Connection" you'll find yourself on a thumb tour of working man America, couched in clever turns of phrase like "chilled me to the bone, now I'm melting in Houston, trying to make my connection home." I'm guessing, in the end, home is where "she" is. The hanging note that finishes the show is "If I should fall behind". At this point in a concert, this would be where the band takes a bow to a wall of applause, waves and leaves the stage as the lights go down. Then a single light comes on to find the singer alone on a stool. In a hushed tone, over a still crowd and a softly strummed guitar a tale unfolds of love found, of a path ahead where they will go together, forever. The song ends, the singer stands and says goodnight. And the crowd smiles and fades away.

In turn you will find "Picture This" melodic, nuanced, emotional. Steve avoids the obvious rhymes and instead finds the right ones. His clarity is a rarity. His music isn't for everyone, but if you have an open mind, a loving heart, and an ear for timeless lyrics you might find it fits you like a glove.